



Qin Feng
秦风

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Black Ink in Flight

Private view: 16 May 2013
Exhibition: 17 May 2013 - 25 May 2013
16 Bloomfield Terrace
London SW1W 8PG

M I C H A E L
GOEDHUIS



Foreword

Qin Feng is an irreverent and iconoclastic artist dedicated to sweeping away the tired formulae of classical Chinese ink painting and intent on revitalising the tradition so it can be relevant and meaningful to today's world and in particular to Chinese society. Born in the harsh wastes of northern China in Xinjiang Autonomous Region in 1961, he studied mural painting at the Shandong University of Art in the early eighties and was one of only two artists in the Province who radically experimented with imported styles of contemporary art during that period.

From 1996 to 1999 he taught at the Berlin University of Art while further exploring the possible synthesis of modernism and the ink painting tradition. In 1999, Qin moved to the United States and now divides his time between Boston and Beijing where he has founded his own museum for avant-garde art from both China and the West. His audacious pictorial cocktail of stylistic themes from East and West is symbolised by the dyeing of many layers of xuan paper with tea and coffee... a metaphorical gesture of the two cultures blending together. His exceptionally fluid and assured brush technique, related as it is to Abstract Expressionism, is a persuasive manifestation of the vitality of the calligraphic tradition.

His work has been widely exhibited both in Asia and in the West, most notably at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 2010 in their groundbreaking *Fresh Ink* exhibition and last year at the Shanghai Art Museum. The latter exhibition will travel on this year to the Dallas Museum of Art, and then to the Venice Biennale by special invitation.

Michael Goedhuis

Dialogues in Ink

Xinjiang, Berlin, Boston, Beijing: seemingly disparate and distant points on a map, they are the places Qin Feng has called home. From the frontier of China's vast northwest, to cultural capitals of Europe, America, and Asia, Qin Feng's movements reflect the reality of the contemporary Chinese artist whose career and creative development is played out on a global stage. Evolving art markets, expanding economies, and shifting political realities have characterized the art world of the early 21st century. So have the legions of contemporary Chinese art stars who have negotiated tastes and trends to invigorate the contemporary art world. Qin Feng is one of these - an artist whose works are visually bold and exceptionally rich with layers of meaning.

Qin Feng's compelling life story includes a childhood spent in Xinjiang, the autonomous region of China's far northwest. Immense in size and rich in history, the area's cultural and linguistic diversity left their marks on Qin. Though he alludes to the less-than-ideal circumstances under which his family was relocated there, Xinjiang's sweeping open spaces nurtured in Qin a sense of adventure and an appreciation for scale. The experience of herding sheep instilled in him a strong work ethic, and marked him with a powerful physical presence reflected in the robust images and dramatic installations that are hallmarks of his art. Qin Feng now divides his time between studios in Beijing and Chelsea, Massachusetts, near Boston - seemingly

divergent locales, but ones that keep him rooted in two worlds. The languages and cultures may vary, but they reflect the expansive and inclusive nature of Qin Feng's work.

Contemporary artists have a deep reservoir of forms of expression from which to draw: conceptual art, installation and performance art, new media and architecture, as well as more conventional two-dimensional mediums, like painting. In other words, the possibilities are limitless and culturally non-specific. Qin Feng, however, has chosen a more perilous, but inherently more rewarding path. He mines the tradition of Chinese ink painting and calligraphy for its modern idioms. Tradition, ink, painting, calligraphy - these could be construed as part of a grand conservative gesture, rather than a means of modern expression. But for Qin Feng, looking to the past has proven to be a wellspring of creativity. Qin proves the continued relevance of brush and ink as mediums, and calligraphy and its iterations as contemporary forms. His dynamic engagement can be seen as a multi-faceted dialogue between past and present, of which we can be a part.

Qin Feng's engagement with the past is fundamental to his choices of medium (brush and ink) and form (calligraphy). For a decade, this dialogue was at the core of *Landscape Civilization*, a series of works whose inspiration arose from the written languages of different ancient civilizations. The goal was not to valorize the language or the civilization, or the past, for that

Desire, Landscape No. 11.1C, 2011

Ink, coffee and tea on paper | 200 × 100cm
(78¾ × 39½")





matter, but to deconstruct the language to its essential forms and elements. *Civilization Landscape Series 0017* (2012) is such an image, which lends itself readily to Qin's spirited brushwork.

Ink and paper were the preferred expressive mediums for traditional Chinese painters and calligraphers. Qin Feng adopts them but engages in a contemporary display of ink-play. He alters the forms in ways that suit his unrestrained vision. Coffee and tea often transform his paper from stark white to a golden-brownish hue that gives the effect of age. Rather than hinting at antiquity, though, his caffeinated pigments add visual depth. Could they also be a nod to the beverages that once defined East and West, but are now widely consumed across cultures? Each beverage carries with it a cultural association of hospitality and encouragement. Their unexpected use in Qin's paintings not only enhances the works visually, but deepens their meanings, too - as a sly signal, a welcoming gesture, inviting us into the conversation.

Qin Feng engages us in various disarming ways - most notably through the images themselves. Painting or print, ink or oil or acrylic, hanging scroll or accordion-folded screen, his powerful brushwork marks them all. He exploits the effects of brush and ink on paper, just as Chinese calligraphers have for millennia. All at once, drops of ink explode on contact, as in *West Wind East Water 004* (2006). These sprays of ink appear alongside the striations of ink on paper that calligraphers call "flying white." As the ink-laden brush moves rapidly across the paper, its drying hairs separate and leave trails of white amidst the ink. This ancient technique produces an effect both dynamic and poetic, as in *Desire, Landscape* (2011). That Qin employs such practices deepens his own negotiation of the tradition, even as he draws us into this artistic interchange.

The metaphysical dialogue Qin Feng enacts promises to be the most difficult - and the most rewarding. In this, Qin excels as interlocutor. The single stroke has long had spiritual connotations in Chinese calligraphy. In Daoism, calligraphy engages mind, body and spirit, with brushstrokes embodying the infinite and the finite all at once. The energy and scale of Qin's works intensify these aspects. *Desire Scenery Series 0010* (2012), comprises three sides of a rectangle articulated with a vigorous brushstroke. It is an enigmatic form rendered visually compelling through brush and ink, coffee and tea. Calligraphy is a spiritual practice in Zen, too, with brushstrokes detached, ironically, from meaning. Instead, they are invested with symbolic significance. The absolute, the cosmos, even creativity itself can be read into strokes that are the physical manifestation of the focus and concentration of the meditative mind. In *West Wind East Water 0609* (2006), Qin explores the one-stroke circular form that embodies the quintessential aesthetic of Zen. But this aesthetic is altered through Qin's deliberate engagement, as he juxtaposes landscape elements beneath and within the central form, and alludes to other visual languages and painting traditions.

Qin Feng's works are questions asked and answered. In his paintings, he transforms the vitality of brush and ink and makes that energy visible to us. We can easily be rendered speechless by the grandeur of the gestures and the mesmerizing images - but for the unspoken invitation to join him in this wordless communion.

Left: *West Wind East Water 0609*, 2006

Ink on paper
129.9 × 94.3cm (51¼ × 37¼")

Desire Scenery Series 0010, 2012

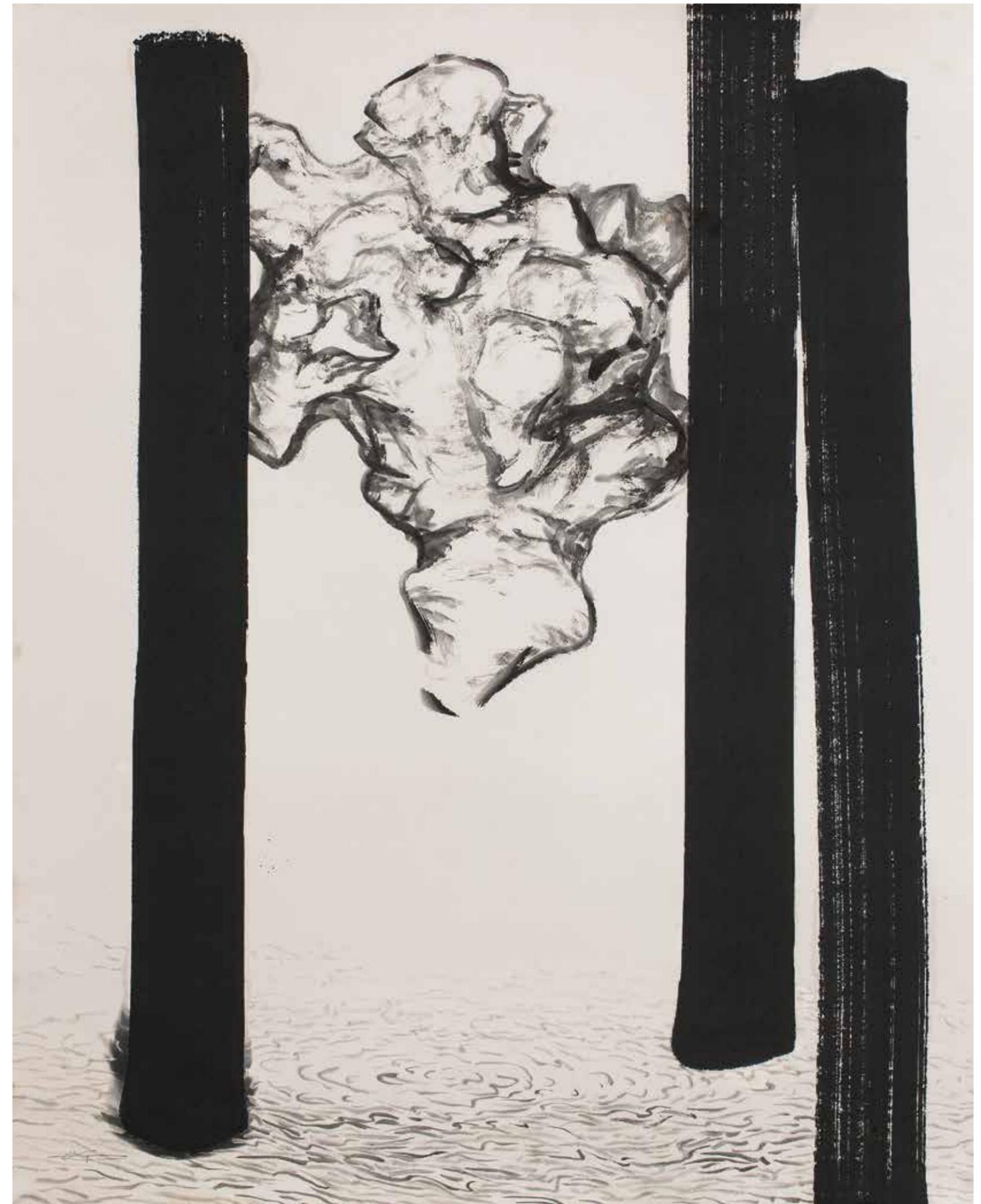
Ink, coffee and tea on paper
200 × 125cm (78¾ × 49¼")





Civilization Landscape Series 0017, 2012

Ink on paper
100 × 125cm (39¼ × 49¼")



Desire Scenery Series 0039, 2012

Ink on paper
125 × 100cm (49¼ × 39¾")

Desire Scenery Series 0011, 2012

Ink, coffee and tea on paper
200 × 125 cm (78 ¾ × 49 ¼")



Desire Scenery Series 0013, 2012

Ink, coffee and tea on paper
125 × 200 cm (49¼ × 78¾")





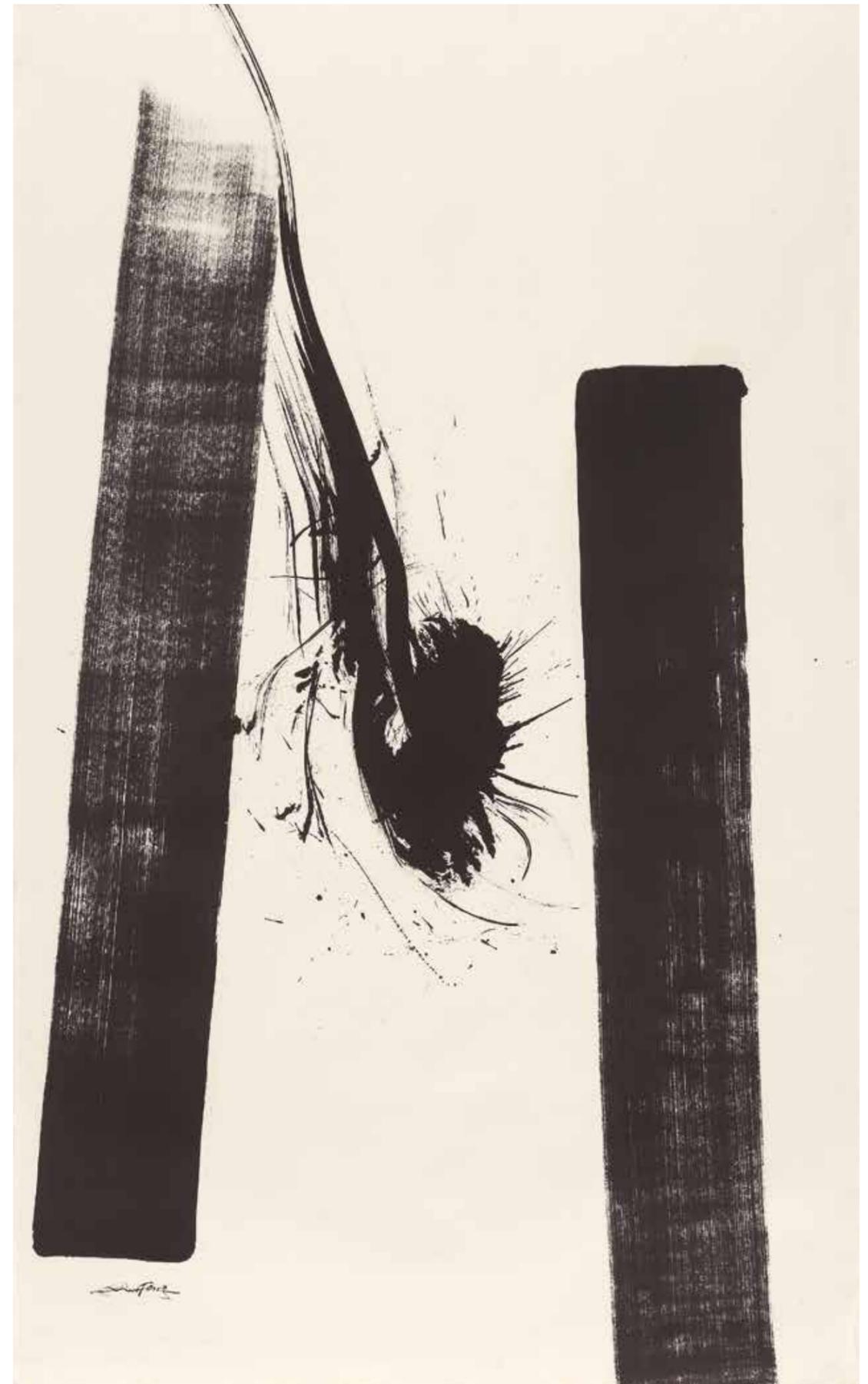
Desire Scenery
Series 0013, 2012

Ink, coffee and tea on
paper | 125 × 200 cm
(49¼ × 78¾")



Left: *Desire*
Scenery Series 0035, 2012

Ink on paper
125 × 100 cm (49¼ × 39¾")

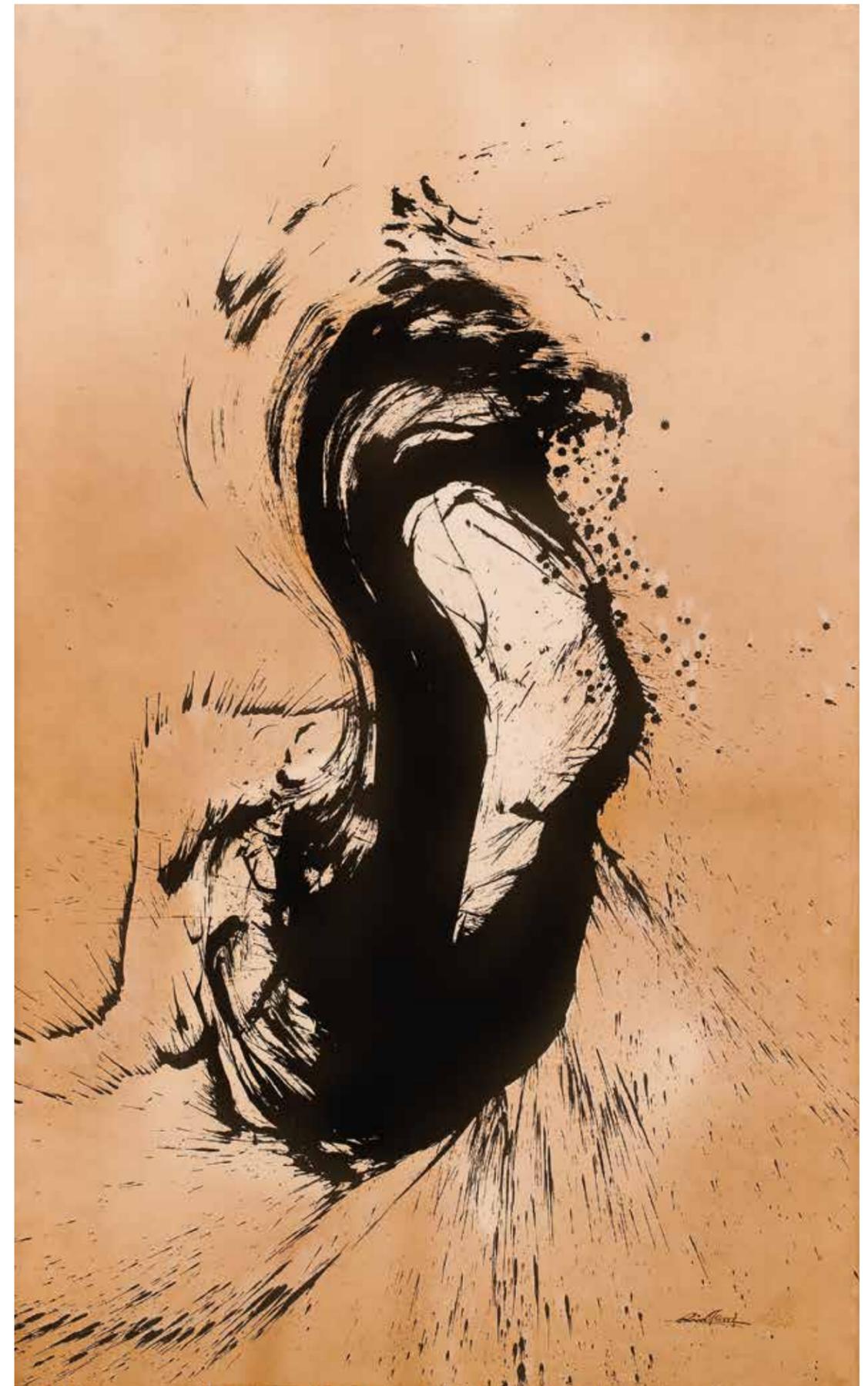


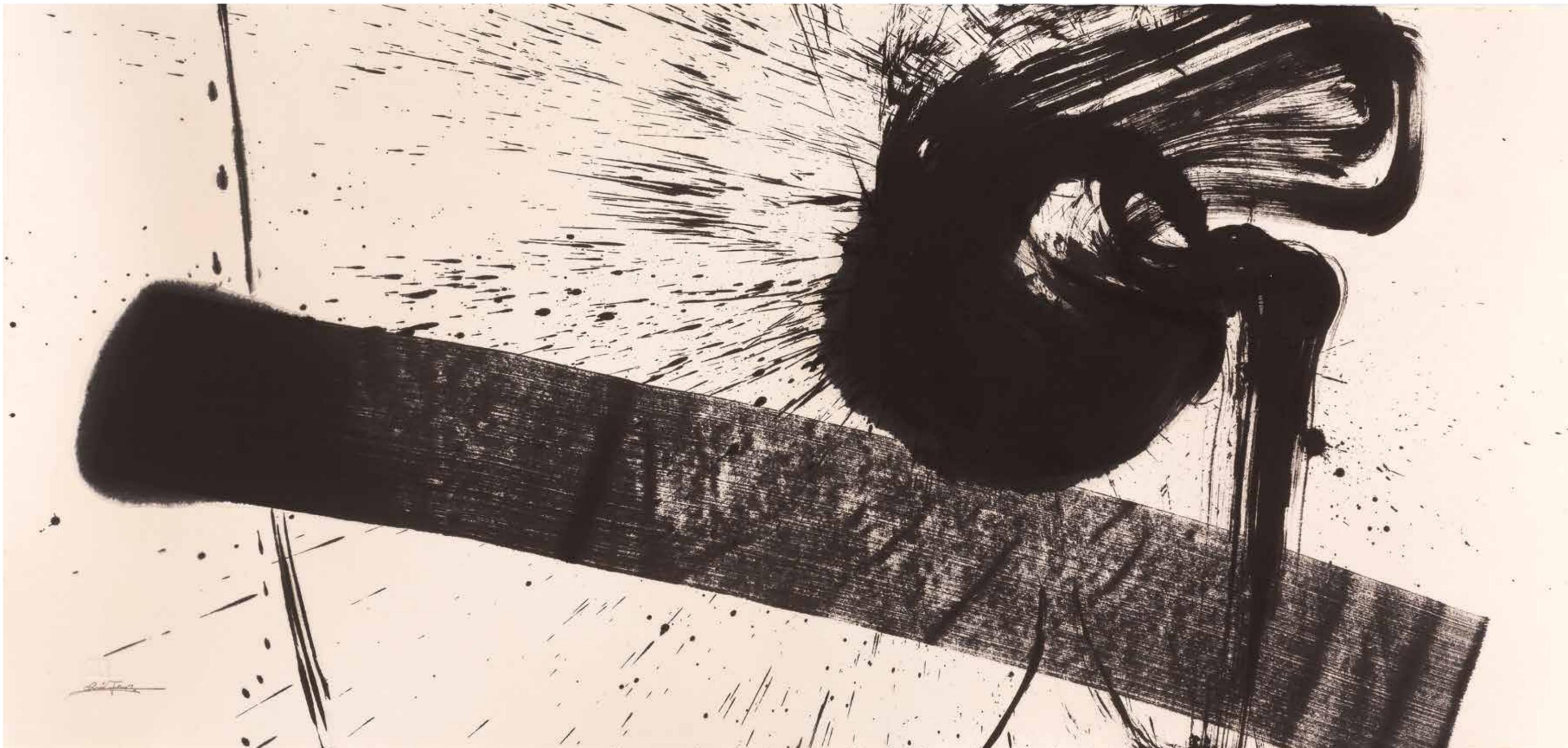
Right: *Civilization*
Landscape Series 0016, 2012

Ink on paper
125 × 100 cm (49¼ × 39¾")

Desire Scenery Series 0012, 2012

Ink, coffee and tea on paper
200 × 125 cm (78 ¾ × 49 ¼")





Desire, Landscape No. 11.3, 2011

Ink on paper
100 × 200 cm (39 3/8 × 78 3/4")

Desire Scenery Series 0009, 2012

Ink, coffee and tea on paper
200 × 125 cm (78 ¾ × 49 ¼")



Civilization Landscape Series 0014, 2012

Ink on paper
125 × 100 cm (49¼ × 39¾")



Desire Scenery Series 0041, 2012

Ink on paper
125 × 100 cm (49¼ × 39⅝")

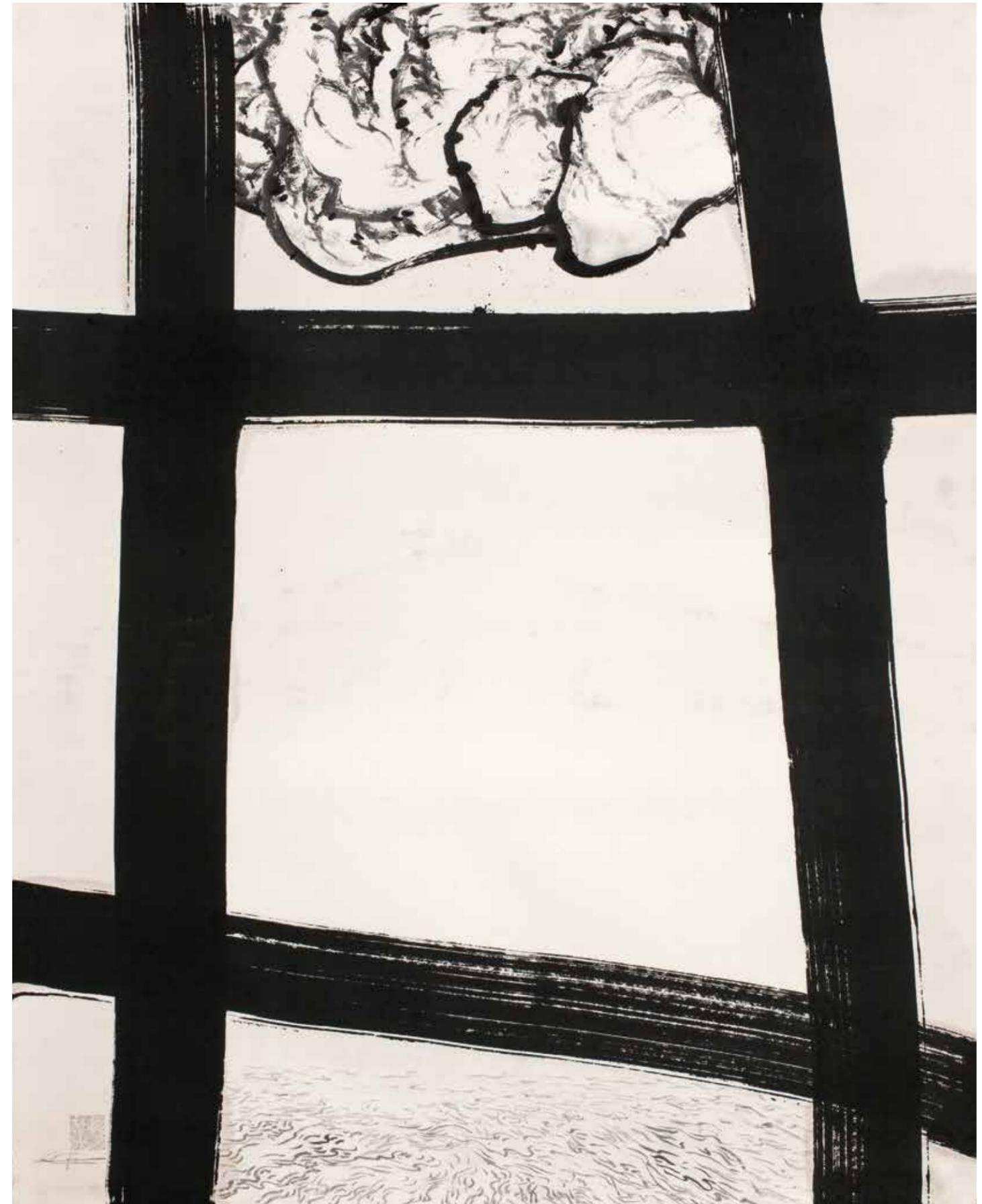


Image left to foreword:

West Wind East Water 004, 2006

Ink on paper | 160 × 160 cm (63 × 63")

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MICHAEL GOEDHUIS PUBLISHING
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61 Cadogan Square
London SW1X 0HZ

T +44 (0) 20 7823 1395

F +44 (0) 20 7823 2794

london@michaelgoedhuis.com

www.michaelgoedhuis.com